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COERCIVE STRATEGIES

PANAMA 1989: A CONTRASTING TEMPLATE FOR COERCIVE STRATEGIES

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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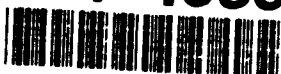
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Abstract of  
COERCIVE STRATEGIES  
"PANAMA 1989" A CONTRASTING TEMPLATE FOR COERCIVE STRATEGIES

In identifying and selecting military courses of action, military commanders must consider the mission, the enemy, the terrain and the time available for the envisioned operation. When developing a strategy based on coercion, strategic and operational planners must also consider preexisting conditions that may inhibit the successful use of the coercive strategy. A failure to identify negating conditions can quite possibly cause unacceptable delays, adversely affect non-targeted populations, or may even lead a commander to hastily adopt a less attractive alternative strategy.

United States foreign policy with Panama from 1987-89 provides an excellent examples of how coercive strategies fail due to pre-existing conditions. In analyzing the coercive strategies applied against General Noriega, the level of effectiveness these strategies attained and the significant reasons they failed, can be applied as a template to similar regional crises.

Teddy Roosevelt's most famous words, "speak softly but carry a big stick," can still be an effective strategy for the future. But without a clear understanding of the inherent limitations associated with coercive strategies, it will fall well short of achieving U.S. national policy objectives.

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## INTRODUCTION

Operational Theater Commanders have come to realize that increasing national and international opinion opposing the use of force will deny them, at least initially, of the most effective means of achieving national policy objectives. The CINCs are expected to dovetail the many specialized resources at their disposal into flexible deterrent or coercive strategies, applied individually or collectively, to attain policy objective short of a military conflict. Designed as an influence strategy, coercion requires two crucial elements to make it effective: a plausible threat capable of inflicting undesired costs, and the promise to suspend the punitive action should the threatened party submit. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962, provides an excellent example of a successful coercive strategy. President Kennedy imposed a quarantine around Cuba to coerce the Soviets to immediately withdraw their troops and nuclear missiles from Cuba. The two crucial elements to an effective coercive strategy were correctly interpreted by the Soviets. The threat was obvious and through much dialogue between the two world powers, the desire to withhold from punitive action was also made abundantly clear.

The shift from a global threat to "regional challenges" as articulated in the latest National Security Strategy, offers many new challenges with regard to coercive type strategies. The recent failures to engender non-violent solutions to regional crises in places like Grenada, Panama and Iraq have spurred much discussion concerning the usefulness of coercive strategies.

This paper will specifically address the 1989 Panama crisis, indicate why the coercive strategies failed and provide a useful template for the Unified Commander to help identify how and when coercion can be utilized to resolve future regional crises.

**Chapter One**  
**"OPERATION JUST CAUSE"**

On December 20th 1989 President Bush addressed the American people from the White House concerning his decision to order American military personnel into combat in Panama. The preceding two years of failed strategies in dealing with Manuel Antonio Noriega, had culminated in the United States taking military action once again on the isthmus of Panama.

In Late 1989 the future looked extremely grim for the Noriega dictatorship. Following two unsuccessful coup attempts, provoked primarily by political and economic pressures applied by the U.S., Noriega proclaimed himself "Maximum Leader" and declared his military dictatorship to be in a state of war with the United States. The culminating point for President Bush and his senior advisors was the killing of an unarmed American serviceman, the wounding of another and the brutal beating of a third at a military check point. General Noriega's reckless threats and subsequent attacks on Americans in Panama required immediate action in order to safeguard the more than 35,000 American citizens in Panama. By early December 1989 the situation had become irreconcilable. The only feasible strategy remaining was one of military action necessary to carry out a classic "coup de main" in Panama. The stated objectives were to protect American lives and vital interests in Panama, as well as to demonstrate U.S resolve for the deposed fledgling democracy of the Endara regime. More simply, to forcefully remove Noriega and emasculate the Noriega controlled

Panamanian Defense Force (PDF).

At 12:45 a.m. Wednesday the 20th of December 1989, Task Force Bayonet, following the largest airlift since Vietnam, began its attack against the PDF headquarters known as the Comandancia; "Operation Just Cause" was underway. An extremely complex operation involving near simultaneous strikes against 27 targets, involved a unified force of U.S. Army Rangers, Navy SEALs, light infantry, paratroopers, and Marines, supported by attack aircraft, helicopter and Specter gunships, as well as light armor vehicles. Following eight intensive days of operations, the 27 targets were effectively smashed, the PDF was eliminated as a military threat, General Noriega sought refuge in the Vatican's Papal Nunciature in Panama City, (later to be turned over to the U.S), and almost unanimously, observers hailed "Operation Just Cause" as a near perfect example of a successful "surgical" military operation.<sup>1</sup> The rapid military success enjoyed and the surprisingly low number of civilian and combat casualties on both sides, was attributed directly to three factors: First, the U.S. troops were highly disciplined and trained, obtaining military objectives quickly without deviation from the established Rules Of Engagement (ROE). Secondly, an unusual opportunity to rehearse against many of the actual military objectives during the days and weeks preceding the operation undoubtedly aided in the ease and swiftness to attain the objectives. Lastly, General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, persistently demanded full and near simultaneous application of all available U.S. firepower to apply overwhelming

force. This was designed to thoroughly resolve the conflict quickly and with minimal losses.

The resounding success of Operation Just Cause brought not only overwhelming domestic support for President Bush, but also surprisingly, for the administration's handling of Panamanian foreign policy in general. This was evident by a 74% approval rating in a New York Times/CBS Poll taken after the invasion, up from just 50% in November.<sup>2</sup> It was surprising because, other than in response to a crisis developing rapidly with little prior U.S. influence, the use of direct military force would otherwise be considered a significant failure in U.S. foreign policy.

Some pre-conflict debates were raised which asked many disturbing questions of the administration and it's handling of Panama. For the most part these challenges stemmed from the one prevailing question, how had the situations been allowed to degenerate so far before it drew serious attention from Washington? Why the pre-conflict debate didn't reflect itself in post-conflict public opinion polls, presumably has more to do with the overwhelming surge of national pride which follows such successes (as seen following Grenada and Iraq), than it had to do with any consensus supporting the administrations policies or strategies utilized to defuse the Panamanian crisis.

The cognitive template of the Vietnam conflict is well ingrained in the American psyche. The deep seated fear of repeating the mistakes which led to ten painful years of conflict has since been successful in reining the American ardor for military intervention

in support of democratic expansion. Keeping that in mind, it is easier to understand why the American public was seemingly elated by the success of the Panama invasion and why it was easy to forget that the use of force should be the ultimate admission of Washington's failure, not an accepted means of making U.S. policies successful.<sup>3</sup>

Two U.S. Administrations failed in their attempts to apply significant amounts of pressure to coerce the Panamanian dictator toward a non military abdication of his position. In an attempt to discern the rationale behind each strategy applied by Presidents Reagan and Bush, the following paragraphs will analyze those strategies, the level of effectiveness they had attained and the most significant reasons they failed to achieve the U.S. policy objectives in Panama.

## **Chapter Two**

### **DIPLOMATIC COERCION**

The road to invasion began in mid-1987 when Secretary of State George Shultz had concluded that Noriega's support to the Drug Enforcement and Intelligence agencies had out lived its usefulness. Noriega, the "Panamanian Bad Boy", was now gaining world wide attention due primarily to his one-time top military aide Roberto Diaz Herrera, publicly accusing him of drug activities and corruption. Street protests and organized strikes swept through Panama as local opposition to Noriega formed the "Civic Crusade". The U.S Congress passed a resolution supporting the Civic Crusade's call for a return to a democratic government. Noriega struck back by forcefully breaking up protestors and jailing opposition leaders. In July 1987, a PDF-backed mob attacked the U.S. embassy in Panama causing extensive damage, but no one was injured. The State Department took immediate advantage of the decaying situation, suspended both military and economic aid to Panama, and broke off diplomatic ties with Noriega. A visit by Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage in December 1987 was designed to voice growing U.S concern about reports of political murder, civil rights violations, cocaine trafficking and money laundering in Panama. The stern message from the Reagan administration to Panama was clear, "the entire U.S. government, including the president, is upset with the situation in Panama and that Noriega had better clean up his act or get out".<sup>4</sup> What diplomatic effect this meeting had on the Panamanians is not known. The fact that

Noriega continued business as usual can only characterize this attempt at diplomatic muscle flexing, as a complete failure. In February 1988, U.S. Grand juries in Miami and Tampa Fl. indicted Noriega on drug trafficking charges and the administration uniformly joins in the fight to expel Noriega.

The U.S. State Department first began secret negotiations with Noriega in Feb 1988. The main issue of those talks centered around dropping the indictments against Noriega if he stepped down. There was much inter-administration disagreement between officials on this issue. Many felt it would look like another Iran-Contra deal, or at least as if the administration was willing to "make deals" with drug traffickers. Reagan overruled the opposition, deciding it best to get rid of Noriega first and then deal with the negative public opinion. He ordered the State Department to go forward with the deal and Assistant Secretary of State Michael Kozak was sent to Panama with instructions to close the deal quickly. The deal collapsed when Noriega demanded more time to prepare his PDF forces. Kozak relayed this back to the White House and they flatly refused. As Kozak was preparing to leave Panama, Noriega telephoned and accepted the deal unchanged. Kozak again called Washington and Secretary Shultz said, "It was too late and all offers were off the table". He believed Noriega to be "diddling" with the U.S.<sup>5</sup> The subject of the secret talks soon became public and sparked a great deal of domestic outcry. The proposed deal with Noriega briefly became a part of the United States presidential campaign. Bush staunchly defended his position to

oppose the deal, but ultimately lost the morale high ground on that issue. The Reagan administration moved quickly to keep the Panamanian problem out of the press until the end of the elections. They were successful by making it policy to limit questions and refusing interviews on the subject. Bush was elected president in late 1988 and no further attempts at diplomatic coercion were attempted against Noriega until May 1989. The civil unrest reflashd in May 89, corollary to Noriega nullifying the Panamanian presidential election.

On May 10, when Noriega's forces attacked opposition candidates in plain view of the world, President Bush escalated diplomatic pressure in a televised speech in which he denounced the actions by saying, "We will not be intimidated by the bullying tactics". He also said he would not rule out further steps in the future.<sup>6</sup> Bush had called for increased military presence in the region and added personnel to the U.S. bases located near Panama City. He also called for a new military aggressiveness toward the situation. A clear symbolic indication of the ardent message President Bush relayed, was inferred by the recall of the U.S. Ambassador to Panama, a step normally recognized to accent the seriousness of any situation. Despite the fact that other strategies were being employed concurrently and that President Bush had made it obvious he was going to take serious steps against Noriega, the coercive diplomacy strategy failed to fulfil policy objectives in Panama.

Two clear reasons for the failure of this strategy surface when analyzing how it was utilized. First, the administration had not

taken an initial hard line against Noriega. When Richard Armitage was sent to Panama, he presented the administrations displeasure, but at the same time maintained a friendly and congenial attitude during the visit. Apparently, this was to enable the Pentagon to distance the visit from any inference that military action would be taken to oust Noriega.<sup>7</sup> This approach undoubtedly sent mixed signals to Noriega, giving him hope that the "old boy" network he had once been a part of in Washington, would ultimately dissuade military interference. Secondly, when it looked as if Noriega would concede to U.S. demands during the Kozak visit, the White House had not allowed the deal sufficient time to play out. Noriega needed time to camouflage the deal to trade his removal for dropping the indictments against him, unfortunately it required a few hours longer than the State Department was willing to accept. Noriega had surrounded himself with a "mafia" style protectorate. This group of high ranking PDF officers gained fortune and power through Noriega's illegal dealings and would be placed in an awkward situation should Noriega step down. Had the State Department perceived the pre-existing conditions Noriega had to overcome within the PDF to camouflage such a deal, the demand for a modest amount of time could have been anticipated and the policy objective would have been realized short armed conflict.

### **Chapter Three** **POLITICAL COERCION**

One underlying difference between diplomatic and political coercion is the perspective from which the pressure is applied. Pressure applied multilaterally through a structured political process, which attempts to force the outcome of a particular situation, is what is termed here as political coercion. In an attempt to apply multilateral pressure to Noriega, the United States made every effort to draw upon concerns for regional stability by Panama's neighboring countries through the Organization of American States (OAS).

Historically the OAS has not had much success in dealing with troubles in Latin America and frequently the tensions between the U.S. and the Latin American members had been strained. In 1965 the organization was forced to give its after-the-fact approval of American involvement in the Dominican Republic and in 1982 its Latin American members overwhelmingly supported Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands.<sup>8</sup> In 1979 however, the OAS in a rare act of unity with the United States, was instrumental in terminating the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua. President Bush had hoped that the 32 nation body would again apply a substantial amount of political pressure to help resolve the Panamanian crisis. The OAS called an emergency meeting following Noriega's annulment of the May 1989 elections. Although most of the members adamantly condemned the annulment, they unanimously agreed to reject any act of violence or threat of intervention from any power. Stating that

"they would take such an attack as an attack against all Latin nations".<sup>9</sup> The OAS had established, as a result of the meeting, a list of conditions that Panama must comply with. This list included the transfer of power through democratic means by 01 September 1989, and that this transfer of power must reflect the will of the Panamanian people. Despite many days of negotiations with the OAS officials the U.S. could not convince them to adopt stronger language in the drafting of their response nor could they convince the OAS to demand Noriega specifically give up command of the PDF. The Panamanian opposition, headed by Endara, criticized the OAS resolution which called for new elections, as allowing Noriega to continue to delay what has already been decided by the Panamanian people. Many felt that leaving Noriega in power through another election, was like leaving "the fox in the hen house".

On the first of September, selected by a Noriega controlled Counsel of State, Francisco Rodriguez was sworn in as the new president of Panama. The U.S. refused to recognize him and stated that it would not accept any candidate proposed by a Noriega controlled government. So the latest rounds of negotiations left Noriega unwilling to accept any situation which forced him from his position and the OAS was unwilling to apply the multilateral teeth to support his removal. The OAS was unwilling to vote for thorough economic sanctions, let alone the use of military force. The multilateral political pressures applied to coerce Noriega from power were thwarted for one main reason, the organization in position to apply the pressure was without the teeth to do so.

The financial situation of the OAS was at its lowest level in 40 years. This due primarily to the U.S. withholding substantial amounts of dues owed the OAS, because the U.S. had lost faith in their ability to settle regional disputes. The U.S. assessed contribution had been up to forty million a year and accounted for two thirds of the OAS budget. The aversion of the U.S. to pay its full financial assessments bore striking parallels to the problems encountered by Washington in dealing with the United Nations.<sup>16</sup> Without funding for an Inter-American Peace force, the OAS could apply little more pressure than that of public censure. From Noriega's perspective, being ostracized by his neighbors was far better than what he might be faced with, should he decide to leave Panama.

#### **Chapter Four** **LEGAL COERCION**

Panama's corrupt military and undemocratic government was the most visible flaw in the political system. However, the "War On Drugs" was emerging as a major issue in American Politics with emphasis being redirected toward combating the problem at the source by attacking the production and distribution networks. What had been known, but not well publicized in the American press, was that among Panama's main businesses were drug trafficking, arms smuggling and illicit trade of all sorts. The problem became indisputably clear in February 1988, when two U.S. grand juries in Miami FL. handed up indictments on General Noriega for drug smuggling and related charges.<sup>11</sup> Testifying before a U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Narcotics and Terrorism, Jose Blandon, a former Panamanian official, gave testimony concerning various illicit activities of Noriega and the PDF. The U.S. administration was initially caught off guard and unprepared when the indictments on Noriega was passed up from the Justice department. Many questions were asked of the Reagan/Bush administration in view of the publicity surrounding the indictments. When asked during the Presidential campaign, had the administration tolerated or endorsed Noriega's drug trafficking because the dictator gave occasional assistance to the Contras? Bush parried the implied charges by explaining that although the administration had received some reports of alleged illegal activity, the U.S. had not yet acquired sufficient proof of

Noriega's complicity.<sup>12</sup> Little appreciation surfaced by those outside the Justice Department for the autonomy of the Attorneys Office. But once the decision was announced, the administration was quick to apply this latest development as leverage to force Noriega out. The Panamanian's rising discontent with the PDF and Noriega, coalesced by the U.S. indictment, brought increased support for the National Civic Crusade. The National Civic Crusade was a fledgling organization made up of business and labor groups, dedicated to a democratic government in Panama, and this included the resignation of Noriega as the head of the PDF. Following the announcement of the U.S. indictment of Noriega, protestors were organized by the Civic Crusade and hit the streets of Panama City to apply pressure to President Eric Arturo Delvalle to fire Noriega. On February 25 President Delvalle, with encouragement from U.S. officials, dismissed General Noriega as head of the PDF. The next morning the Noriega controlled Panamanian National Assembly was called to meet and quickly voted to dismiss Delvalle and put the education minister in his place. The U.S. continued to recognize President Delvalle as the legitimate leader in exile and he later went into hiding in the U.S. The National Civic Crusade as the civilian opposition, didn't have the military power to force Noriega out and the U.S. did not have an extradition agreement with Panama, at the time, to bring Noriega to justice in the United States. Consequently, there was little more the U.S. could do without provoking intensive anti-American response from the Panamanian's or other Latin American countries.

To understand why Noriega was steadfast against abdicating his position as a result of coercive pressure applied through legal means, one would have to understand two important contributing factors on Noriega's side. First, Noriega was in control of the Panamanian National assembly and knew they wouldn't force his extradition. Match that with his strong armed control of the civilian populous and he determines correctly, that it would require military action from outside the country to force him out. Secondly Noriega knew there were still certain sectors of the U.S. government in February 88, that would support him. The Drug Enforcement Agency, the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency all had an interest in continuing cooperation with Noriega. The initial apprehension by the administration to the indictments helped Noriega feel certain there was still support for him in some sectors of the U.S. government and may actually have stiffen his determination to remain in power.

In sum, although the strategy to coerce Noriega through legal pressure had succeeded in making him appear as a rogue mobster operating autonomously within the Panamanian system, the local civil opposition failed to generated enough muscle to force him out. So although Noriega was aware of the growing U.S. pressure against him, he had reasons to believe his support within the U.S. government was sufficient to prevent any military course of action.

## **Chapter Five**

### **ECONOMIC COERCION**

When ousted PDF Deputy Roberto Herrera publicly accused Noriega and the PDF of election fraud, murder, drug trafficking and corruption in 1987, street demonstrations and protest strikes swept through Panama City. Opponents of Noriega began lobbying in the U.S. Congress and releasing statements to the newspapers, trying to force the U.S. to help remove Noriega. Following the July 1987 embassy attack, President Reagan, on advice from the U.S. Ambassador to Panama, began initial economic pressures against Noriega by suspending all economic and military aid to Panama.<sup>13</sup> Due to the extensive consequences economic sanctions can have, not only regionally but globally, it is not used as a normal tool to apply pressure during the initial stages of a regional crisis. Not until Noriega subsequently thumbed his nose at all successive strategies, did the U.S. adopt the hard-line by applying economic sanctions as leverage against him.

In March 1988 President Reagan, in concert with exiled President Delvalle, issued an executive order preventing the transfer to Panama, of any Panamanian assets held in the United States. In addition, the U.S. began holding all payments due Panama as a result of the Canal Treaty in a separate escrow account for later benefit of the Panamanian people. The U.S. Treasury Department was a strong opponent of this strategy. They claimed that the international financial system was unstable and that the 135 banks in Panama with over forty billion in assets, had the potential to

disrupt international banking and exchange rates.<sup>14</sup> The result of the actions taken by Presidents Reagan and Delvalle was economic paralysis, which in turn fueled a series of strikes and protest in Panama and likely triggering the coup attempt made in March 1988 by mid-level PDF officers. Loyal PDF forces easily put down the coup, however, the unrest was a clear sign that the economic pressure was influencing an unfavorable domestic reaction against Noriega.

Again Noriega proves that attempts to get rid of him will not come easy. Contrary to the initial positive indication produced by the hard-line economic approach, this strategy ultimately failed because the United States was unsuccessful in completely isolating Panama from outside support. Many Latin American countries condemned the U.S. sanctions. Mexico took the strongest steps toward easing the strain of the U.S. sanctions by announcing in April 1988, that it would offer crude oil to the Panamanians at easy-credit terms. Libya's Muammar Gadhafi provided 24 million in cash, funneled through Cuba, to help ease the financial strain. Many U.S. companies also had substantial interest in maintaining a healthy Panamanian economy and the economic sanctions were beginning to rebound against them. Several large American companies, even after the sanctions were in effect, still managed to get money in and out of Panama.<sup>15</sup> Noriega used his own money, presumably drug money, to pay his forces, and together with other PDF officers, took advantage of the dire economic situation to buy or obtain controlling interest in many businesses that were in financial straits.<sup>16</sup>

The hard-line economic coercive strategy failed to produce short term U.S. policy objectives. As Noriega defiantly clung to power in spite of economic sanctions, strategic reassessment of U.S. policy was required, as administration officials quietly began to acknowledge that harsh sanctions were hurting Panamanians and U.S. companies more than Noriega himself. Again the Administration clearly misunderstood the pre-existing conditions present in Panama that thwarted the coercive economic strategy. Panama, not Noriega would be hurt by these sanctions and the Panamanian people still had no means of taking control.

## **Chapter Six**

### **MILITARY COERCION**

U.S. military strategy continues to maintain that the willingness to plant a flag, or at least to show one on occasion, demonstrates national resolve in a manner that cannot be conveyed by diplomatic or public communication alone.<sup>17</sup>

Be that as it may, there remained considerable difference in the approach toward solving the Panama crisis between the U.S. State and Defense Departments. The State Department had favored a hard line military approach toward ousting Noriega from as early as February 1988. The Defense department, on the other hand, opposed such an approach for two primary reasons: First, many senior military officers vowed to never again allow the military to be pulled into another Vietnam situation. Fearing, not only that a poor policy decision may again cause the military to be isolated from the American mainstream, they also believed it would help Noriega paint the U.S. to other Latin countries, as the old Yankee imperialists. Second, the military worried that the almost 11,000 military personnel and their dependent would be placed at risk by Noriega's extremists and that military forces would be freer to take action once the military dependents were out of danger.

As the last of the diplomatic negotiations fell through in May 1988, the United States turned to its only feasible option remaining, covert military action. In July 1988 President Reagan signed authorization for the CIA to help in formatting a coup with former PDF colonel Eduardo Hassan, in an attempt to use the PDF

against Noriega. The Senate Intelligence Committee adamantly objected because the operation smelled of an assassination attempt and the U.S. executive order prohibited such actions. Inter-departmental accusations were flying following a press leak that gave away the covert operation and clearly displayed Defense Department opposition to military involvement. Although the press leak had foiled the plot to support a coup attempt, it had been successful in sending a strong message that U.S. tolerance for Noriega was growing very thin. However, what anti-Noriega enthusiasm that did remain in Washington was being down-played, probably due to the upcoming U.S. presidential election. Meanwhile the anti-Noriega opposition in Panama was "left out to dry", without support and in disarray. Moreover, PDF continued low level harassment of American servicemen and facilities, ever aware not to cross the line that would indicate imminent danger to U.S. personnel or threaten the security of the canal.

The day following the May 10, 1989 annulment of Panama's presidential election, President Bush announced measures to show U.S. displeasure. Bush sent 1900 troops as reinforcements, ordered U.S. citizens in Panama to evacuate to local U.S. bases and stated he would exercise the rights under the Canal Treaty to move forces freely. For the first time signals were being sent out from the administration that the U.S. would no longer rule out the possibility of using force. Bush also openly called for the PDF to assert itself on the side of democracy. American forces in Panama continued exercises, and increased movements throughout Panama.

This increase in military activity provided invaluable training for American forces, as well as presenting a clear demonstration of U.S. capability to Noriega. The coercive benefit that should have come from this amount of posturing, was again weakened as the Defense Department continued to send signals opposing direct force.

Provoked by the Bush administration, which openly encouraged the PDF to overthrow Noriega, a second coup attempt was made in October 1989. Despite holding Noriega captive within his headquarters for a number of hours, Major Giroldi's effort to force Noriega into retirement, failed. The Bush administration received heavy criticism for failing to take advantage of the situation. Although officials initially denied having prior knowledge of the attempted coup, the administration later confirmed U.S. involvement in efforts to block roads used to bring reinforcements to Noriega's assistance. The failure of the October coup, illustrates clearly the misreading of all the preexisting conditions which have enabled Noriega to resist.

The United States set up the PDF in its infancy as purely a policing force. The ability to defend against foreign invaders was not necessary, because the canal treaty mandated the U.S. to that responsibility until 1999. This situation allowed the PDF to gradually permeate and control every level of Panamanian society. The institutionalized corruption rampant in Panama perpetuated an atmosphere that provided security for the higher ranking members of the PDF and National Assembly. No small scale coup, regardless of who backed it, was ever likely to force Noriega from power. Absent

of an organized insurgency backed with weapons from the outside, Noriega had no fear his position was in jeopardy. He had been working with the United States for many years and well understood that unless he threatened the security of either the U.S. personnel or the canal, the United States would not have cause to justify military intervention. So despite the overt and covert gesturing by the U.S. the coercive military strategy, short of force, also failed to bring about national policy objectives in Panama.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion**

The failure by the United States to engender a non-violent solution to the Panamanian crisis in 1989, provides the theater commander with excellent examples of how coercive strategies can be inhibited by pre-existing conditions. The coercive strategies applied against Noriega and the Panamanian people were primarily ineffective because they failed to affect Noriega directly. The position Noriega evolved to in 1987, had an inherent aspect that sufficiently shielded him from outside pressure. Economically, legally and militarily he was protected by the corruption which permeated all levels of the PDF and the National Assembly. His inner circle, made up of senior members in these organizations, would continue to protect him as long as it remained profitable to them. Because of this situation, Noriega did not have the autonomy to respond to diplomatic pressure, as many in the administration had believed. It is true that these coercive strategies generated much anti-Noriega sentiment among the Panamanian people. They were, however, unarmed and incapable of channeling this distaste for Noriega into actions capable of bringing about change. So, if changes were to be made in Panama, they would have to come from outside the country.

The OAS was grossly inadequate in it's ability to influence events in Panama because it lacked the muscle required to enforce the resolutions it passed down. Therefore, the U.S. remained the only regional force capable of bringing change to Panama.

The coercive strategy could have been a more effective means of

achieving national policy objectives in Panama. This operation identified three basic questions that needed to be answered by the CINC prior to adopting a coercive type strategy:

1. Will the target of the coercion be affected by the pressure applied? The coercive strategy applied pressure to the Panamanian people, however, this pressure could not be transferred to Noriega and essentially remained ineffective.

2. Does the coercive strategy send the intended signal? The U.S. administration frequently sent mixed signals to Noriega by failing to initially acquire and present one unity of purpose. The apparent floundering toward a consensus by the administration only gave Noriega reason to doubt U.S. intentions and may actually have strengthened his resolve.

3. Is the administration willing and able to apply the threat should the coercive strategy fail? Here the U.S. was extremely successful. Overt military posturing presented a clear and unmistakable signal to Noriega of U.S. resolve. Had Washington not answered the failed coercive strategy with appropriate force, the U.S. would never again be able to answer regional threats with a coercive strategy response.

The theater commander must use the answers obtained from these questions, in order to determine the effectiveness of a coercive strategy. Although, the use of force may still have been required in Panama, a more synergistic application of coercive pressure may have assured Noriega earlier of U.S. resolve and forced him to acquiesce short of a military confrontation with the United States.

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